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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 001083

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [EAGR](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: GOI FILLS OUT CABINET, MANY PORTFOLIOS STILL ON HOLD

REF: A. NEW DELHI 1072

[B.](#) NEW DELHI 1062

[C.](#) NEW DELHI 1056

[11.](#) (SBU) Summary: The Indian Government announced 59 additional Ministers on May 28, bringing the total number to 178. However, no portfolios have been made public aside from the six top spots previously announced (Ref B). All told there are 33 Cabinet Ministers; ranking slightly below that, seven Ministers of State with Independent Charge; and below that, 38 Ministers of State. Apart from the new Foreign Minister, S.M. Krishna, there are no surprises. Congress Party leadership selected (or negotiated) carefully to ensure that all caste/community, religious, gender and regional concerns were addressed. However, a few interesting wrinkles arise. "Young" members of parliament did not receive an abundance of ministerial posts. The average age of the Cabinet Ministers is 62, while the average age of the remaining Ministers is 53. Regionally, Maharashtra and West Bengal, two states that will hold state assembly elections relatively soon, received nine and eight ministers respectively. Uttar Pradesh received only five lower-level minister posts despite its unexpectedly strong performance for the Congress Party in the elections. There are five Muslims total among the 78, two of whom are Cabinet rank, both from Jammu and Kashmir. Overall it is a relatively solid, status quo government. We expect portfolios will be announced in the coming day or two. End Summary.

Ministers, Without Portfolios

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[12.](#) (U) At a swearing in ceremony on May 28, the Indian government officially expanded its Cabinet adding 59 Ministers. The first tranche of 19 Ministers were sworn in on May 22 (Ref C) for a total of 78 Ministers. However, of the 78, only six have officially been assigned portfolios (Ref B). According to Embassy contacts, some of the 72 unassigned Ministers have been told by Congress Party leadership what their posts will be. However, at the swearing in ceremony today, no portfolios were officially announced. Likely, Congress Party leaders are still

wrangling with their allies over the last few spots.

Youth - But not in the Cabinet

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¶3. (U) While there are several "youth" names in the lower level Minister of State posts, there are none among the top 33 Cabinet positions. Relatively well-known youngsters Jitin Prasad, 35, and Joytiraditya Scindia, 38, both return as Ministers of State. Media darling Rajasthan MP, Sachin Pilot, 31, will be a Minister for the first time. The youngest Minister is Agatha Sangma, 28, from Meghalaya. She is a member of the Nationalist Congress Party and daughter of former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma. The most notable "youth" name not among the 78 is Rahul Gandhi, whose thoughts on the new government and his role in the Congress Party have been reported septel (Ref A).

Regional Considerations

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¶4. (U) Maharashtra received nine Ministerial slots, including one for the disgraced former Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmunk. He was forced to resign in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks. It is not merely Maharashtra's size - it occupies 48 seats in parliament - that accounts for its heavy representation in the Council of Ministers. The Congress Party leadership no doubt has an eye on the coming assembly elections in the state this September. Party leaders hope the increase in attention from the central government and the

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enhanced visibility of these individuals bodes well for the party during the state assembly polls.

¶5. (U) West Bengal, which received eight Ministerial posts, will hold state assembly elections in early 2011. Seven of the eight Ministers from West Bengal come from the new Congress Party ally, Trinamool Congress. After crushing the communists in West Bengal by winning 19 seats - up from only one in the 2004 election - Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee secured the prized Cabinet-rank Railways Ministry for herself and six Minister of State positions for her party.

¶6. (SBU) Despite the Congress Party's surprise showing of 21 seats in Uttar Pradesh, the state did not receive any Cabinet posts. Two Minister of State with Independent Charge (a mid-ranking ministerial post) and three Minister of State (a lower-ranking ministerial post) slots were allocated to Uttar Pradesh members. Media noted that this is relatively little for a state that sends the most members to the Lok Sabha, 80, and was a key battleground success for the Congress Party. Some analysts point out that "ignoring" this state is not a good strategy if Rahul Gandhi is to succeed in his effort to revive the party in the state to its glory days. Others point out that two MPs from Uttar Pradesh, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, hold more actual power than nearly all of the 33 Cabinet Ministers combined.

Solid, Status Quo Government

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¶7. (SBU) Comment: Overall, the new Indian government represents experience with a pinch of youth, but still heavily tipped towards older politicians. Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh have generally been able to choose the Ministers they want, without the kind of harassment they faced from the myriad allies in the previous government. We expect portfolios to be announced shortly, even as early as this evening. End Comment.

BURLEIGH